to get something which is above the head of someone else. A polite person realizes that it is very impolite to touch the head of another person, even that of his closest friend. To hit someone over the head with the mak kok is a very grave offense. The mak kok, which signifies olive, is a fist formed in such a manner that the middle finger sticks out beyond the other fingers. To point out an object with one's foot is the gesture of a very crude person. A polite person always avails himself of the index finger of his right hand to point out something to someone. 576 /826/

On a visit.--When one arrives at the house of a Laotian one walks very softly and greets in the Laotian manner. If the owner of the house /973/ extends his hand, one should greet him in the European manner. Once in the living room one must wait till one is told "Sit down" before sitting down. The polite person asks his guest to sit down immediately after the exchange of greetings. 574 576

When you enter the house of a European, never walk in stealthily the way you do with a Laotian. The European would think that you had come to stab him. You should walk in such a way that he can hear you, without, at the same time, stamping on the floor with all your strength because you would, in so doing, frighten the master of the house. Before entering, you must knock on the door quite forcefully; then you must wait till you are told: "Come in!" or till someone comes to open the door for you. The Laotian visitor does not dare knock on the door for fear of committing an impoliteness, but he coughs outside the door.

In the living room the master of the house has arranged all the furniture in a certain way. When you are invited to sit down, you should do so without moving the chair that is designated to you. If you are offered a cigarette, you may refuse politely if you do not not smoke. If you do smoke, you should accept it. You will notice that there are ash-trays in the room. Use them. Do not drop the ashes from your cigarette on the table, the chair or on the floor. /353/

To receive something from a superior, the polite Laotian extends his right hand supported by his left hand.

Visiting the sick.--When one of our acquaintances has fallen sick, we must inquire about him by paying him a visit. If one is prevented from doing so by something important, one can have a 734

734 friend take one's place.

Laotians when they pay a visit to a sick person, prattle noisily,
574 ask the sick person a great number of unnecessary questions, and
576 sometimes tell him stories to cheer him up. This custom must stop. The patient, who is tired, needs rest. The visit one pays him should not last longer than ten minutes.

574 Condolence visit.--The Laotian ceremony connected with
576 the condolence visit is the opposite of the Western ceremony. The
764 The visitor, instead of appearing sad before the family of the deceased, is gay and smiling.

In order to give you an idea of what goes on in a house in which a death has taken place among the Laotians, I shall content myself by citing here certain passages from my article, "The custom
764 of funeral ceremonies in the land of Laos" (1): "Those who believe
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1. In Kinnary, No. 4, November, 1946.

in the existence of the phi place a tray of food intended for the deceased near the coffin. Furthermore they place, at the head of the coffin, a sword marked with a cross with chalk, together with a superstitious formula in order to prevent the phi from stealing the coffin away from the deceased. The coffin has to be watched over day and night. The watchers talk, play certain games, or engage in any other diversion. /274/

/825/ "In the course of this watch cats are also prevented from prowling around the coffin. A cat which were to jump across would provoke the resurrection of the dead person, according to what certain people say.

"The house in which the person has died is called heuan di (happy house). There one works, sings, dances, and plays. From it can be heard the sound of orchestras and shouts of joy. Such spectacles have something disconcerting about them to the eyes of strangers. Nevertheless, one should not regard this behavior as a sign of irreverence towards the deceased person. Despite its smiling appearance, the family of the deceased suffers profoundly. It abstains from violent shedding of tears and from public lamentations because it considers a discreet grief more dignified and the sense one has of death in this way a nobler one."

/779/ It would be difficult not to respect this tradition which stems